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Confessing Love to the Nation: Audrey Yu Jia Hui's Works and Identity Reconstruction

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Abstract

This article addressed identity reconstruction through an analysis of two of the most prominent fictional works by one of the Chinese Indonesian young writers, Audrey Yu Jia Hui. In encompassing the idea of identity rewriting, I addressed Hui's second and third novels respectively, Mellow Yellow Drama (2014) and Mencari Sila Kelima (Searching for the Fifth Principle, 2015), through the post-structural concepts of Derrida's deconstruction, and also in relation to cultural studies views on identity. The works were analyzed through close-reading technique. The novels were published during the Reformation (Reformasi) era, where politics had served to be a profound aspect that directed the cultural identity and social attitude of the society. In a range of aspects, from narrative structure to their deeper themes, Hui's literary works were found to draw on a distinguishable set of strategies which enabled Hui to establish her own identity as someone who was liberated, culturally accepted and free to embrace local colors. This article also showed that Audrey Yu Jia Hui's narratives have served as an acceptance of an individual's multiple identities, which often depends on the problem at hand as well as the context of choices.

Key words: *contemporary Chinese Indonesian literature, Audrey Yu Jia Hui, identity reconstruction, deconstruction, postmodern narrative*

Introduction

By and large, the Chinese Indonesians have mostly been viewed for their powerful stronghold in the economic sectors which accounted for more than 70% of the elite business in Indonesia – a condition which at the same time often makes them object of controversies and

scape goats for political dissatisfaction (Suryakusuma, 2013, pp. 91-92) (Anggraeni, 2010, pp. 113-114). This, however, is hardly followed by acknowledgement of their roles in other fields such as politics and literature, with the latter was deemed to have emerged in around 1918 by the end of World War I.

The Indonesian Chinese literature or *Sastra Melayu Tionghoa* was initially part of the Chinese Malay literature in 1870, but it did not receive the same level of acknowledgement as that of its Indonesian literature counterpart (Alisjahbana, 1957, pp. 57). At that time, *Sastra Melayu Tionghoa* was kept in a separate category from *Sastra Indonesia*. Despite its repressed honor, Chinese Malay literature continued to provide colorful aspects to readers for its diverse genres and problematic issues of Dutch colonization. It later joined the Indonesian literature after the country officially gained its independence in 1945, and known as the contemporary Indonesian literature, of which it is commonly known today.

This research focused on how the works written by Audrey Yu Jia Hui, *Mellow Yellow Drama* (2014) and *Mencari Sila Kelima* (*Searching for the Fifth Principle*, 2015), presented ideas on identity reconstruction from a young Chinese Indonesian woman writer. This research was important based on the following reasons. First, *Mellow Yellow Drama* and *Mencari Sila Kelima* were among the first books to have revealed “new” ideas of identity reformation from a Chinese Indonesian millennial, who was born during the reign of the New Order and was raised during the Reformation era. While other Chinese contemporary authors after *Reformasi* write about metropolitan romance and interest of studying abroad, Jia Hui writes about her concern of Indonesia and issues regarding national identities of its citizens.

Second, in tandem with the first reason, if one had looked at the role of Chinese Malay literature as the earliest “crystallization” of Indonesian history which represented the events occurring during the era of Dutch colonization but received little acknowledgement from Balai Pustaka, the leading Indonesian Board of Literature Committee at that time (Bandel, 2007, pp. 189), it could be seen that Chinese Malay literature was a crucial chain to view the whole “face” of the growing contemporary Indonesian literature. Hui’s works in this case represented minority’s perspective on the condition of Chinese Indonesians at that time, who were discriminated and segregated during the colonization, and only limited on the economic sector.

So far, Audrey Yu Jia Hui’s viewpoint as an author and structural elements found in *Mellow Yellow Drama* (2014) had been explored using Goldman’s Genetic Structuralism approach, a theory that analyses literary works based on the authors’ worldview and social background. It results in some standpoints that: 1) the upheld theme is the dimension of egoistic and social levels, 2) the extrinsic element described in the narrative is the interrelation of historical background which makes for the social depiction in the narrative, 3) Audrey Yu Jia’s views consist of the values of humanism, existentialism, nationalism, and religiosity (Fernando, Mulawarman, and Rokhmansyah, 2018). The weakness of this study is that Genetic Structuralism only viewed Jia Hui’s works according to her social and cultural background (which

constructed her worldview), but it missed to notice the text's instability and "other" meaning found within the text, which could be slightly different from the author's intended worldview.

In this article, the researchers would like to discuss the identity reconstruction in Audrey Yu Jia Hui's works in which she tried to redefine her identity as a part of a minority in Indonesia using Derrida's deconstruction approach. Compared to using Genetic Structuralism, using Derrida's approach has several advantages. First, it can view the instability and the "other" perspective found in both texts that were barely visible when they were analyzed using Genetic Structuralism perspective. Secondly, it can prove more about Jia Hui's transformed identity and its dynamics. It was done so by examining the detailed descriptions when Jia Hui as the main narrator faced rejections to her love of her country and her will to be of use to her surroundings.

To fulfill this purpose, the researchers specifically focused on two titles of Audrey Yu Jia Hui's works, which were *Mellow Yellow Drama* (2014) and *Mencari Sila Kelima (Searching for the Fifth Principle)*, 2015). After the introduction part, the researchers discussed Derrida's deconstruction theoretical exposition, conceptualization of identity, a brief outlook on the emergence of contemporary Chinese Indonesian literature, Audrey Yu Jia Hui's life chronologies from the two books, the literary elements found in them, then the

main discussion regarding deconstructing Audrey's identity and the idea of Indonesia-ness, and finally, conclusion.

Theory and Method

The research of this study, which was based on three printed texts in total, was conducted in 2017. The focus of the study was on analyzing two textual sources written by a contemporary Chinese-Indonesia author, Audrey Yu Jia Hui. This study primarily used the close-reading technique. The data, which consisted of direct quotations of both texts, was elucidated using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory.

Through identifying binary oppositions, the power of centralization toward aspects or categories which were previously considered 'dominant' such as men, ratio, and progressivity could be seen to possess their own inconsistencies, and thus the order can be rearranged. In that way, one can understand what kind of thoughts that lurk behind any expression delivered from one party to another, and then be able to unravel them. Being skeptical and questioning become the primary purposes from deconstruction in any existing text reading. Interestingly, Derrida showed that in any text itself, there are forms of inconsistencies which emerge naturally through word parables, choices of sentence, and partiality (Haryatmoko, 2016, pp. 134).

For Derrida, the text is the life itself, "... has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end" (Derrida, 1974, pp. xii), which is consistently open to any

kind of interpretation. Other than that, a tradition expressed in a text, when it is viewed through the eyes of deconstruction theory, can reveal new forms of interpretation which have never been thought or known before. Haryatmoko provided an example that the concept of 'pribumi' in Indonesia, which refers to 'the natives', can possess a gap that even migrants can be categorized as the natives since they did 'arrive' and 'settle' first than the children of the 'real pribumi' (Haryatmoko, 2016, pp. 134). This kind of discourse concept was the one that was continually applied by Derrida, "*Deconstruction is inevitable or it is nothing at all; ... Its process involves an affirmation, this latter being linked to the coming [venir] in event, advent invention*" (Derrida, 1992, pp. 337).

Derrida saw that meaning or understanding from everyday languages is actually a trace/track, which is the search/tracking of meaning concept in mind that is grasped because of the game between the signifier and the signified working all this time (Aminuddin, 2002, pp. 177-178) (Tyson, 2006, pp. 253). This mental trace works best at speech or writing level, but for performative written texts, retrace or reconsideration can be done to probe complete new perceptual possibilities. Interestingly, those texts will later establish a number of new relations/connectivity with other texts so there can be found a repetition/alterity, escapement, and eventually displacement, which can alter one image concept to another (Aminuddin, 2002, pp. 179).

The ultimate concept coined by Derrida was *différance*, meaning delay or reversal, which is the approach that strives to delay the establishment of signifier and signified as well as reverse binary oppositions found within his predecessor's approach, Saussure's structuralism (Haryatmoko, 2016a, pp. 217). Word suffix 'ance' was deliberately used by Derrida to represent two verb meanings at once, which is *différer*. The word was derived from English words, 'defer' and 'differ'. Though when pronounced the sound is just the same as 'difference', with the election of the term, Derrida wished to prove that what can be understood by one of the five senses (of which the concept is none other than the ratio) actually cannot grasp what is truly operating behind it, that one mere word does not mean literally in black and white.

According to Haryatmoko, an expert of discourse analysis from Indonesia, the first step of Derrida's deconstruction is *undécidable*, which is the disassembling of the metaphysical hierarchy (Haryatmoko, 2016a, pp. 218). What is meant by metaphysical hierarchy is none other than binary opposition; hence one can consider what kind of ideology that is at play behind a text. Therefore, *undécidable* is a strategy logic which no longer takes side in black or white area. However, this initial strategy is still inside the logo centric limitation because it is still bound to the previously established concept, so a continuing step is necessary to neutralize the relationship of those logo centric forces (Haryatmoko, 2016a, pp. 221).

The second step is the dissemination. Contrary to the Saussure's structuralism which highlights syntaxes and metaphors, dissemination views that texts are no longer texts, and that materials are no longer matters that are bound to the previous hierarchical relation, but it is also not super-writing or super-material (Haryatmoko, 2016a, pp. 222). Metaphors, which were founded by philosophers, apparently still exist within the braided Western logic so they are unable to get out of logo centric network. In this sense, metaphors are understood as interpretation which has myriad faces or meanings, as well as being unstable in text reading, which can overthrow the hierarchy of concept-metaphor (Haryatmoko, 2016a, pp. 223). Through the syntax of metaphors which provide acknowledgement toward the other, deconstruction resolute that texts are no longer fixated on absolute truth.

In this study, Derrida's deconstruction approach is applied to prove that identity is not something that sticks to every individual from birth, with particular characteristics which originated from the social construction. The approach would show that a person can see him/herself to be belonging to a variety of groups altogether. More importantly, Derrida's deconstruction would highlight that each of the mentioned identities can be of importance to the person, based on the existing complications, the context of importance to the person, based on the existing complications, the context of choice as well as the his/her own sense of values.

Audrey Yu Jia Hui's Life Chronologies

In *Mellow Yellow Drama*, Audrey Yu Jia Hui recalled her childhood memories when the death news of her *akung* (grandfather) reached their family twenty years ago. Being a spoilt four-year-old girl, an only child from a very affluent merchant Chinese family in Surabaya, she remembered being shocked to the core for having 'lost' both of her grandparents in less than a month, despite her *akung* still had been in a perfectly good health several weeks previously. Jia Hui noted that while her *ama* (grandmother) was still in comatose after a road accident and awake later after her grandfather's death, her *ama* was permanently defected and had to live the rest of her life as a cripple. Upon learning the hard truth that life is indeed short and fragile, Audrey was determined to make her life meaningful.

Unfortunately, Jia Hui's "off-limit" perspectives were deemed too early for her age and she was always bullied by her peers and relatives. This condition had gone on for several years until Jia Hui entered elementary school, when she learned and memorized everything about Pancasila, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, *Indonesia Raya*, and other philosophical concepts. Jia Hui confessed to have fallen deeply in love with them that they stayed everlastingly in her heart for years. Yet, most of the sneering's and rejections Jia Hui had received ensured her that a Chinese Indonesian, let alone a young woman of a well-to-do family background, should not entitle herself to the matters of a country which were

'owned' only by those who called themselves the natives or *pribumi*.

Audrey's worries were soon confirmed when she was just about 10 years old, as the news of the 1998 Riot in Jakarta finally opened her eyes. She saw how many Tionghoa girls and women had become victims of rape, arsoning, and murder at the downfall of Soeharto's New Order regime. From then on, Jia Hui had instilled a feeling of self-hatred toward every physical attribute that made her Chinese and the social status gap which divided the locals from the Tionghoa people.

To distract herself, Jia Hui developed a fondness for reading English classics, learning foreign languages (English and French) and watching international news as preparations for studying abroad. Yet, to Jia Hui's disdain, her mother began to introduce her to the circle of Chinese elites in the hopes that one day Audrey would marry one of the sons of their business conglomerate acquaintances. Jia Hui finally escaped these marriage arrangements as she got accepted in a special program for gifted young women at Mary Baldwin College, Virginia, USA. After a year, she transferred to College of William and Mary for her undergraduate studies; majoring Physics while also taking social courses in various fields of study. Jia Hui obtained her bachelor's degree with a *summa cum laude*, as well as getting elected as a member of National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS), Golden Key International Honor Society, and

eventually Phi Beta Kappa. When she finally returned to Indonesia, Jia Hui joined an NGO to volunteer to teach and help unfortunate children for a brief period before her parents restrained her from those activities as they were deemed 'dangerous' toward her safety as a Chinese woman.

For the next four to nine years, Jia Hui was unable to take a job or start a new life, until the time she went to Singapore that she encountered Chinese Singaporeans who loved their country, but were able to keep their original Chinese names and still spoke Mandarin freely as their vernacular tongue. Later, in order to return some of her lost 'parts' of identity, Jia Hui changed her name legally from 'Maria Audrey Lukito' to 'Audrey Yu Jia Hui', although she feared that her new name would probably cause more sentiments and obstacles in the future. Along the way, Jia Hui met an old friend of her father, Dr. Zhang Qi Wen, who shared her ideas about loving Indonesia and Chinese cultural heritage.

In *Mencari Sila Kelima*, Jia Hui had taken a job in Changzhou, China, in an international machine factory where she translated documents from Mandarin to English and vice versa, as well as teaching English to employees. Audrey expressed her genuine admiration toward the present-day tradition of Chinese people which was ingrained so deep in their ancient philosophies and literary works. Jia Hui constantly compared the situation in China to the one in Indonesia, and concluded that Indonesia would need to

revise its educational root system in order to advance itself in the world.

Literary Elements of *Mellow Yellow Drama and Mencari Sila Kelima*

Mellow Yellow Drama (2014) told Audrey Yu Jia Hui's life story from her childhood, school days in Indonesia (from kindergarten to high school), college years (in College of William and Mary, Virginia, USA), and her meeting with Dr. Zhang Qi Wen, who instilled her interest in learning Mandarin language. On the other hand, *Mencari Sila Kelima* (2015) told the continued life story of Audrey, with her taking a job as an English translator and teacher in China. Jia Hui also narrated her days as she was enrolling in Qinghua University, majoring in Marxism studies.

The choice of title for *Mellow Yellow Drama* was interpreted as such: 'mellow' referred to Jia Hui's melancholic state in falling for her Indonesia but at the same time feeling lost and abandoned as nobody supported her love, while 'yellow' stood for her Chinese identity as part of the 'yellow-skinned people', and *drama*

referred to Jia Hui's emotional upheavals in which her patriotic enthusiasms were met with rejections from both her Chinese acquaintances and the *pribumi*. Meanwhile, for the title choice of *Mencari Sila Kelima*, 'mencari' is the Indonesian word for 'looking/searching for' and *sila kelima* referred to the fifth principle of *Pancasila* which declared "Social justice for all of the people of Indonesia", inferring a clear irony of the long-term political situation which has often degraded the position of the Chinese/Tionghoa minority. The genre of both books was fiction, and the content was autobiographical, based on the author's life background.

The narrative structure of *Mellow Yellow Drama* was separated into eighteen sequences, with seventeen of them are linear one after another, and one retrospective sequence which served as the trigger as well as the strong reminder for Audrey in pursuing her dreams and ambitions for her birth country, Indonesia. It can be seen in **Table 1**.

Table 1. The Narrative Structure of *Mellow Yellow Drama*

No.	The Unit Content of Plot in <i>Mellow Yellow Drama</i>	Sequence	Aspect
1	Audrey's description about her first time of falling in love with national symbols and motto: 1.1 "My nationality is Indonesian. The symbol of my country is the Garuda bird (eagle). On its chest, the five principles of <i>Pancasila</i> are plastered..." (Jia Hui, 2014, pp. 14)	Linear	Love for the nation
2	Audrey's description about her school days: 2.1 "Growing up, I slowly came to realize that my questions about the country and the nation, as well as life, though deemed unfit for a child my age, were seeds of nationalism. However, I thought that people around me were the ones who were not ready to deal with a shrewd and opinionated child like me" (2014, pp. 17)	Linear	Audrey's experience as she felt that she was marginalized and as a citizen, she has the right to question the nation.

3	Audrey's description about the incompatibility of <i>Pancasila</i> teaching in education with the real social condition: 3.1 "Growing up, I realized the misuse of national ideology in the education system would only bring catastrophe to the nation. [...] All of the <i>Pancasila</i> idealisms are rubbish if they are used as propaganda tools. Meanwhile, there is still ethnic, religious, and racial discrimination" (2014, pp. 20)	Linear	Contradiction of reality
4	Audrey's description about her experience during the May 1998 riot: 4.1 "During my stay in Indonesia, I have to be careful to protect myself since I am a Chinese woman. Women like me are weaker than the locals. My parents told me this in a fearful and earnest tone that I knew that they were not lying" (2014, pp. 45)	Linear	Identity
5	Audrey's description about the deprived ethnic Chinese identity: 5.1 "The Chinese no longer possess any pride except their money. Name shaved, culture seized. Orientation to financial profit as well as hard work ethic which are the culture of the traditional Chinese immigrants have become a double-edged sword in Indonesia" (2014, pp. 56)	Linear	Confiscated Identity
6	The description of atmosphere when Audrey was musing about herself: 6.1 "I was also shy and angry about being Chinese. In a school where the majority of its students were Chinese, I was not interested in any of the guys whatsoever. Every time I looked at myself in the mirror, the only thought that came to my mind was "Chinese, Chinese, Chinese" (2014, pp. 56)	Linear	A result from New Order Regulation in suppressing Chinese identity. It worked on Audrey, but she later chose to remain Chinese-Indonesian.
7	The confession from Audrey about Indonesians which she obtained from the US: 7.1 "No friend or lecturer ever felt that I was weird when I revealed my opinion about my country. They even admired me. A non-American female student with such sublime achievement who truly loved her country" (2014, pp. 66)	Linear	Love for the nation that provides equality to every citizen.
8	The rejection received by Audrey from her friends: 8.1 "For many local Javanese friends I have ever encountered, I was a spoiled pretty Chinese girl. They thought I knew nothing about the sorrow of the people. That's what they said. 'It's so easy for you to say things such as loving your country. Your parents can pay for your college abroad'" (2014, pp. 94)	Linear	Gap in economy, and it reflects the stereotypes toward the Chinese Indonesians.
9	Audrey's description toward her refusal to marry one of her kind: 9.1 "When the reverend asked my reason, I could not explain that I did not want to date a Chinese guy. The reason was that, I was often degraded carelessly by people from my ethnic group. Whereas, I had never been treated like that in a foreign country" (2014, pp. 99)	Linear	Audrey's reluctance to date Chinese men due to their patriarchal thinking and preference to Westernized men (as they allow women to raise their voices).
10	Audrey's decision to legally change her name: 10.1 "From my birth name <i>Maria Audrey Lukito</i> to be <i>Audrey Yu Jia Hui</i> . [...] As Chinese, I wanted to reclaim my identity with a Chinese name. Some thought I was joking. Some threatened me in the name of God" (2014, pp. 114-115)	Linear	Identity Reclaiming

Mellow Yellow Drama presented how Audrey struggled with her concepts of being a woman and a minority from a young age. Audrey's experience with the death of her grandparents (Audrey's grandmother had been put in a comma due to a hit-and-run, and her grandfather died very suddenly) became the trigger of her endless questions about death and the fragility of life. When she asked her mother what it meant to live, Jia Hui received a rude-awakening answer that people should just have fun as long as they live until it is time for them to die. Horrified, Jia Hui vowed to live her life worthwhile and create meaning by helping others. The older members of Jia Hui's family were Totok Chinese who spoke little Chinese and mostly Indonesian language. Jia Hui decided to

pursue her undergraduate studies in the United States, being under the impression that if she could prove herself worthy in another country, she would be accepted wholeheartedly in Indonesia. During this period, Audrey also narrated her school days in Virginia as she had to adapt to the Western education system and culture. Yet, though her friends and most American people regarded her patriotic ideals, she could not help feeling alien to their culture. Audrey kept on hoping that soon after finishing her studies, she could serve her country and then be considered equal to her *pribumi* counterparts.

Meanwhile, the narrative structure of *Mencari Sila Kelima* was divided into seventeen sequences, with three retrospective and linear sequences, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The Narrative Structure of *Mencari Sila Kelima* (Searching for the Fifth Principle)

No.	The Unit Content of Plot in <i>Mencari Sila Kelima</i>	Sequence	Aspect
1	The description of Audrey's emotion when she was still living in Indonesia: 1.1 "All my life living in Indonesia, never once had I ever felt to be considered as <i>tóng bāo</i> (in Mandarin: 'born from the same womb' or 'fellow citizens') (Jia Hui, 2015: ix). I had always been perceived as different" (Jia Hui, 2015: ix).	Retrospective (Flashback)	Identity
2	Audrey's account about her prejudice which she brings since she was little: 2.1 "You probably think that my big love to the nation automatically makes me unprejudiced, having none of it all. It's not true. I am well aware of every seed of prejudice implanted in me since I was very young. Every day I try to fight it by acting the opposite" (2015, pp. 17).	Linear	The Fight against Prejudice
3	Audrey's account about the danger of prejudice: 3.1 "Well, the greatest danger of prejudice is the closing of conscience. Actually, those who teach prejudice perhaps mean well. It could be that he/she has just experienced a quite unpleasant incident so he/she teaches that prejudice to other people (to his/her friends, children or family) with the hope that they would not experience the same thing in the future" (2015, pp. 19).	Linear	The Danger of Prejudice

4	Audrey's account about the prejudices common in Indonesia: 4.1 "The second prejudice, which is common in Indonesia is the prejudice against different tribes. There were many times when I became an object of prejudice like this, just because I was born Chinese! And, why should I be called Chinese? Because my ancestors were from China and my face resembles theirs. Therefore, I was judged to have certain traits, which were not completely true (that's why they call it prejudice!). My heart, which loved Pancasila, loved the nation, became invisible that I lost count how many times I have been the object of this prejudice" (2015, pp. 22).	Linear	Prejudice
5	Audrey's accounts about religion: 5.1 "One of the religious misuses emerges in the problem of absoluteness" (2015, pp. 23).	Linear	Religious Misuse
6	Audrey's description about the absence of identity of the nation's young generation: 6.1 "Why do many youngsters who are highly educated, fluent in English, search for their identity not from figures who love their country? Instead they search it from actors or actresses who lack morality, live recklessly and aimlessly, then later their outfit, outlook, movements, words are copied?" (2015, pp. 33).	Linear	The Young Generation was Neglecting the Significance of the Nation.
7	Audrey's description about her stay in Liyang, Changzou, People's Republic of China: 7.1 "Frankly, I was very happy in Liyang. It was solely because I felt for the first time embraced by the country. What I meant as 'country' certainly not the PRC government; instead it was the ancestors' very beautiful cultural tradition, which was so great, so engrossed, until I was almost in high spirits although my health condition generally worsened" (2015, pp. 47).	Linear	Multiple Identities
8	Audrey's description about her heartfelt experience while living in China: 8.1 "In Indonesia I had always (once again, without realizing it) viewed myself as part of a certain group: I was Chinese, a Christian, a graduate from an abroad university, et cetera. However, in China all of the variations seemed to have vanished and I was forced to dig deeper, to erase all of them" (2015, pp. 62).	Linear	Identity Reconstruction
9	Audrey's memory when she was still in Indonesia: 9.1 "Later I was reminded of my love toward <i>Pancasila</i> and the country, an unrequited love of mine. I remember the first time I fell in love with it, there was a shame that I was born Chinese. I even rejected all cultural traditions and language of my ancestors which actually truly attracted my heart" (2015, pp. 117).	Retrospective (Flashback)	Multiple Identities
10	Audrey's description about the current condition and situation of Indonesia: 10.1 "Living in Indonesia, I didn't feel like living in a Pancasila country. On the contrary, I felt like I was living in colonial feudalistic era, when every social system had seemed to be 'designed' to simplify the lives of the wealthy" (2015, pp. 128).	Linear	The Problem of Unfinished Nation-Building and the Weakened Rule of Laws that Challenge Indonesian Democracy

In *Mencari Sila Kelima*, Audrey accepted an English teaching job in Changzhou, People's Republic of China, and even got accepted to enroll in Qinghua University. She described how different the attitude of the Chinese was from Indonesian when it came to studying, since she considered the Chinese were mostly diligent and serious about their studies regardless of age or occupation. She often compared the educational system between both countries as to perceive the upsides and downsides of their international advancement.

On Deconstructing Audrey's Identity and the Idea of Indonesia-ness

In *Mellow Yellow Drama*, in order to return some of her lost 'parts' of identity, Audrey tried to follow this step by changing her name legally from 'Maria Audrey Lukito' to her Mandarin one, but still kept her nickname 'Audrey', which is an old English Christian name, into 'Audrey Yu Jia Hui'; although she worried that her new name would probably cause more sentiments and obstacles in the future. Many of her relatives reacted to her name-changing decision by using words such as 'stupidity', 'God will not be happy' to demean and condemn Audrey's effort to regain her identity, implying further difficulties with the major Javanese society and the government if she continued to flaunt her 'Chinese-ness'. However, phrases such as 'have everything', 'no right to be miserable', 'God will surely be sad', and 'He will despise your attitude' did not only present

judgmental traits; they also revealed a sense of ignorance and superficiality toward Audrey's personal issues. It also implied that all these years her family, relatives, friends, and counterparts of church congregation had only accepted the discriminatory practices without struggling to negotiate them or adjust themselves more to the ways of the local culture and traditions in order to gain respect and achieve mutual understanding in the society.

Contrary to what most people believed, to Audrey, her identity as Chinese descent was somewhat 'invisible' to the eyes of the society. She sharply pointed out that her physical Chinese attributes were actually not that different from those of President Soeharto, the second Indonesian president who formed the New Order regime, whose physical characteristics actually did resemble those of most Chinese-Indonesians. Audrey's perception about her ethnic identity coincided with Chris Barker's idea that identity touches both aspects of similarity and difference, meaning that one can be 'similar' to the rest of his/her cultural group, but at the same time he/she can become 'different' from the majority of the society (Barker, 2003, pp. 220). This not-so-stark-contrast fact about the similar physical traits of President Soeharto with that of Chinese-Indonesian boosts Audrey's confidence that although being a member of the minority, she was in fact not that different from the rest of the ruling majority. Her narration, above all, showed that Audrey was well aware of the hidden truth about the discrimination

she and her people were up against, which was despite the intense adversity, she and her people could still negotiate the social conformities hedging them in order to rise and prove multiple identity, and inclusiveness within Pancasila.

In tandem with the previous argument, many of Audrey's native friends still tried to belittle her ambition and achievements by pointing the fact that Audrey's ancestors literally came from China, therefore she was still somehow labeled as immigrant. Although identity is indeed fluid and flexible (Barker and Galasinski, 2001, pp. 29), in Indonesia this was still considered a significant issue since identity is perceived as something fixed, homogenous and monolithic, coinciding with Western past essentialism ideals (Budiman, 2011b, pp. 233). Thus, this automatically made it difficult for its people to treat any aspect of difference coming up with sympathy or understanding, since most of them were already set to think that they had to corner and push things that were 'alien' to them; in this case, people with different ethnicity. Based on the KBBI (Big Vocabulary of Indonesian Language, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*), the word 'real' native meant 'no alloys', 'pure', 'no doubt on its origins', and 'inborn sense of quality' (KBBI, accessed on April 11, 2017).

According to Barker and Galasinski, identity is most significantly shaped from the existence of language, since it is the main 'glue' which interlinks someone with the cultural attributes he/she adheres to (Barker, Chris and

Galasinski, 2001, pp. 29-30). Also, based on the Amendment of the 1945 Constitution Article 6 Paragraph 1 Year 1999-2002, the use of the phrase 'real Indonesian people' or 'real *pribumi* of Indonesia' in mass media has been avoided since it was considered no longer relevant to the current Indonesia's socio-cultural condition (Artharini, 2016). Therefore, it is clear that Audrey's native peers deliberately underscored her ethnicity, trying to alienate her and labelling her as an additional member of the country. It was merely to tone down her predominating achievements and distinct prodigy since they realized they could neither catch up nor compete with her academically. This was also strengthened with the following quote from Audrey, about her father's perspectives about the country and her friend's further reaction to her ideals:

My Papa despises it most whenever I start talking about the nation. Papa himself experienced the era when many people vanished suddenly. The security officials were even like dogs that turned to the sheeps. Houses were plundered. My Papa often says that *Pancasila* is "bullshit". By working hard, earning a living for his family, actually Papa has felt to be indirectly contributing to the country's economy. Papa believes it to be much more useful than my shallow ideas of loving *Pancasila*. (Jia Hui, 2014, pp. 94)

The paragraph of the statement above revealed that the elder generation of Chinese-Indonesian born in the 1950s, in which Audrey's father belongs to was still deeply traumatized and hurt by the discriminatory and repressive treatment of the New Order. This explains why Audrey's father has never had much patience for her aspirations about the country, since he and the rest of his generation had instilled a fixed mindset that their flawed relationship with the government and the Javanese majority could never be mended.

In most of the eyes of my *pribumi* friends that I talk to, I am a beautiful Chinese girl who is spoilt by her parents. I was considered not knowing anything about the misery of the small people. This is what they say. "Of course, you can say these pretty things about loving the nation. Your parents could pay for your schooling in America."

I am confused and furious inwardly for getting that kind of reaction. What is the relevance between loving the nation and studying abroad? Many people who study abroad have no any regard at all to the condition of Indonesia. None of my friends can understand it. They listen to my explanation while shaking their heads. "We do not get it, though."

Both paragraphs explained that Audrey Yu Jia Hui was trying to fit in and demand inclusiveness for the Chinese

Indonesians. It was also revealed that Audrey's *pribumi* friends had secretly resented their own birth country since they were not given equal rights in many aspects such as family, health and educational welfare. Although they were considered the 'true' or 'pure' citizens of Indonesia, they could not completely hide the ironical fact that they had hardly benefitted from that supposedly 'privileged' status.

In relation to what Jia Hui has narrated about the turbulent situations in Indonesia, Benedict Anderson's multiculturalism believed that a nation is in truth not a 'political community' but an 'imagined political community' that is depicted as 'imagined as sovereign', 'imagined as limited' and 'imagined as a community' where the majority of the people have hardly met one another in groups or being able to see the geographical borders of their nation with their own naked eyes, but they can sense the togetherness that the people across the seas are also part of their nation, and that they can have the feeling of limited border which places the location of their country (Anderson, 2001, pp. 8). He also explained that these ideal practices should constitute as an everlasting continuum for they are the foundations that put an entire nation strong together. As nations are built upon the patriotic and nationalism spirits of the people; indeed, there should always be a vast portion of space where it can accommodate myriad differences among the citizens itself, be it one's religious faith, cultural background and tradition,

gender, sexual orientation, political views, and so on.

The term multiculturalism indeed first emerged in the social studies as there were marginalized communities who wished to obtain acknowledgement of equal rights and obligations as part of a country. They demanded that the country they inhabited provide them not only with the land space and job sources, but also a legal acknowledgement from the government that guarantees their social position and identity in it (Dasgupta, 2016, pp. 1-2). From this point, it can be concluded that a nation should protect, value, and celebrate their essentials as colorful ways of life that should be respected and upheld (Willet, 1998, pp. 3-4). As Indonesia has claimed itself to be a civic nation instead of an ethnic nation, the country has a permanent duty to underline the unity values in terms of citizenship instead of concerning religious, race, ethnic and certain community matters (Santoso, 2016). Therefore, Indonesian multiculturalism fundamental ideology has to follow its only way to deal with its people's differences, which is through embracing them as the pillars supporting the existence of the country in the global world (Parekh, 2000, pp. 3).

With these ideals in mind, it can be understood that in *Mellow Yellow Drama*, Jia Hui strived to remind her people that Indonesia still has not completely accepted their position and status as a permanent part of the country. Their long and various contributions in many aspects

(except in economy) have often gone unmentioned and reluctantly acknowledged, with their presence in media and daily matters tended to be mostly depicted in a negative social perspective rather positive. As she was aware that both communities, the *pribumi* and the Chinese, needed each other for support, Jia Hui struggled to prove those who opposed her nationalist aspirations by advancing herself in education abroad. She later realized that the only way to regain her pride and full identity as a Chinese who loved her country is to study her original cultural backgrounds closely, accepting them as part of her 'old world' so that it would help her face the 'new world'. As her acts mutually coincided with the profound points of multiculturalism perspectives, we can conclude that Jia Hui offered a personal narrative reflecting the private journey for re-establishing a multicultural identity that had not been solely applied in the real life of her birth country. Her continual acts to embrace her cultural roots by studying Mandarin language fluently, aspiring to take further study in her ancestral country of People's Republic of China, and spreading the analects of Confucius in her book to introduce people toward the ancient Chinese philosophy, have all been considered as the necessary steps for anyone who was part of a marginalized community to reconstruct her identity.

While constantly sharing ideas about the nation she loves, Audrey also criticized her upbringing in which since a young age, she had been constantly surrounded by people who were not only

righteous but also repressive to other ways of life and thinking. Audrey used words such as 'lost defiant' and 'threatened' to define her and a few others who dared to speak out against the church authorities. This explicitly implies that the church officials whom she had long been acquainted with were simply ignorant and close-minded people who had never felt the need to adjust their religious teachings to real-life practices, especially how to negotiate the injustices and the damaged relationship between the Chinese and the natives. At the same time, they declared that they were the people who did not need to keep questioning themselves and their actions but rather attack and corner those who did not adhere to their ways. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking only sparked bigotry, hatred, and misunderstanding.

In the midst of her troubled adolescence, Audrey also criticized the rapid growing trend in the emergence of 'international' schools as a setback which only generated higher social rift between the stereotypical affluent Chinese and the *pribumi*. In Indonesia, this practice apparently overlapped with the process of being Westernized, thus automatically served as the means for the elites to reinforce their power to the society (Tanu, 2014, pp. 579). Somehow, the cultural reproduction of the elites only strengthened the glass ceiling which separated the have and the poor. Thus, the possibility of creating a larger social gap in Indonesia has increased and therefore made it more prone to inter-ethnic prejudice and violence. Audrey quickly

saw the lurking danger in this system and implicitly tried to warn readers that the best remedies for any mistreatment from the majority toward the minority are the awareness to nurture mutual understanding between each other as well as the willingness from both parties to blend in with one another.

Looking back, although it has been numerously claimed that Indonesia is the most plural nation in the world with so many differences, we cannot neglect the fact that it is prone to inner attacks from the hardening religion-based organizations. First of all, by relating to what Jia Hui has written so far, *Reformasi* of Indonesia has failed to withstand its promise to eradicate corruption, collusion, nepotism (KKN) from political practices. On the contrary, these 'classic' traditions spread much quicker and far worse than during the reign of President Soeharto as freedom of democracy sets in (Magniz-Suseno, 2015, pp. 56-57). Disruptions rose to power as many hardline extremist groups are now threatening the unity and diversity of Indonesia by condemning the use of 'pluralism' and 'multiculturalism' terms in many chances whilst at the same time preferring to *sharia* laws instead as the country's sole anchor (Magniz-Suseno, 2015, pp. 58-59). What is more dangerous is that these people are keen on using force and violence to fulfill their ends. Indeed, it is the right time for *Pancasila* to come back into the light as a reminder of what is actually has been decided as Indonesia's basic foundation. Audrey Yu Jia Hui's *Mencari Sila Kelima* was written for this pressing urge as an answer to her

people's ignorance toward the country. *Sila Kelima* here referred to the fifth principle of *Pancasila* that says: "Social justice for all of the people of Indonesia", in which Jia Hui noticed as the very missing principle in the everyday practices of Indonesian people, albeit her concern for the other four *silas* that were generally left dormant. Indeed, we can agree that justice often presents itself as a privilege for the rich and powerful, with the opposite that it displays itself as some luxury that the poor and the powerless can hardly afford.

Through examining the views of Audrey Yu Jia Hui that were inclusive and liberal, it was crucial to look at her socio-cultural background as a Chinese Indonesian who was born in the era of New Order regime and was raised in the *Reformasi* era. Among many other literary works written by contemporary Chinese Indonesian authors, Jia Hui was one of a few who was persistently consistent in presenting her identity as a 'new' member of the minority, unbound by shadows of the Dutch and Japanese colonization and barely touched by the then-ruling New Order. From the very start of her writing, Jia Hui has never shied away from the spotlight; she continued to use herself, her own identity, as the primary homologic symbol of the discriminated voiceless. The most interesting aspects of her published writings were her perspectives that strive to break stereotypical attributes and embrace diversity and multiculturalism in which the Chinese and the *pribumi* could blend in and adjust themselves to one another.

Compared to other writings produced by other Chinese-Indonesian writers of her generation, one can immediately see that Jia Hui held her Chinese ancestry and heritage at such high regard, not as a way to reinforce her stereotypical cultural exclusiveness but to fully comprehend her cultural roots and therefore prepare her to embrace and combine her still-incomplete identity with the Indonesian culture she had received since childhood. Jia Hui spoke of prejudice, hatred, and stereotype with a clear, dramatic language that put the blame on the ignorance of the adults who chose to live exclusively and apart from their local culture. This was indeed different from many other writings by her counterparts which were mostly concerned in the 'lighter' themes of love, fantasy, mystery and more. In this way, Jia Hui has also made her statement (via her own narration in both books) that she has accepted her multiple identities as part of the values she held and evaluated over and over, as well as the pressing social pressures she faced.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that, as a contemporary Chinese-Indonesian author, Audrey Yu Jia Hui has become a distinctive figure in voicing out her reflection as a suppressed and stereotyped member of a minority group in Indonesia. By applying Derrida's deconstruction to the analysis, Jia Hui's works could also be seen as an extension as well as illumination toward what was actually occurring behind the long-going

misunderstanding and glass-ceiling segregation between the Chinese and the *pribumi*, especially the reluctance of the majority of the Chinese to blend in with the rest of the society. Their submission to the discrimination and their reinforcement of their exclusiveness were considered by Jia Hui as flaws rather than accomplishments since they would only lead to more embittered ethnic conflicts in the future.

Through the lenses of deconstruction, Audrey (the books' character) was seen as a prism that reflects the current Chinese Indonesian millennials who were still in search of their hybrid identity. Instead of throwing away her 'much-prejudiced' heritage in order to embrace the local culture completely, Audrey did the opposite by studying and retracing her Chinese ancestry in philosophy, language and literature; even going as far as living, working and taking up college in People's Republic of China. Although all of these might seem to be re-strengthening her embedded stereotypical exclusiveness, the step was necessary as it was the most first basic foundation in constructing a new identity for any country citizen. With this in mind, Audrey also highlighted the importance of embracing and adhering to multiculturalism values in day-to-day practices as these were the most conducive for Indonesia's diversity principles, Pancasila and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Therefore, once again, Audrey Yu Jia Hui has managed to state her own acceptance of her multiple identities as part of the response toward

the problem and the context of choice at hand.

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